

VZCZCXRO5521  
PP RUEHBC RUEHDA RUEHDH RUEHKUK  
DE RUEHGB #0420/01 0481059  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 171059Z FEB 10  
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6663  
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RHEFHLC/DEPT OF HOMELAND SECURITY WASHINGTON DC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 000420

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TAGS: [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: IRAQ IN-COUNTRY REFUGEE PROGRAM -- MAXIMIZING EFFICIENCY  
AND PROTECTION

REF: BAGHDAD 191

¶1. (SBU) Summary: At the second anniversary of the "Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act" the in-country refugee program has doubled capacity since last year and is functioning more efficiently as it focuses on the most vulnerable in the program. Processing has improved through a concerted dedication of Department of State, Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and International Organization of Migration (IOM) resources. We expect to see over 4,400 Iraqis arrive in the U.S. from the in-country program this year, compared with 1,466 last year, and to have a robust pipeline of ready to travel cases moving into 2011. We are now at capacity. While the number of new in-country refugee applications has decreased and more cases are being interviewed, there is still a significant backlog and the USG continues to hire Iraqis who could potentially qualify for the program. In the face of anecdotal evidence that some applicants are not anxious to travel, we have increased our focus on expediting cases of the most vulnerable and moving those who are eager to travel. End summary.

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Increasing Efficiency and Capacity  
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¶2. (SBU) The in-country direct access P2 refugee program created by the Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act is operating with increased efficiency and capacity. As a result of larger IOM and DHS teams the program is on pace to double the number of refugees processed in Baghdad this year. In FY 2009, DHS sent 6 circuit rides of 5 officers each and interviewed 4,662 individuals. In 2010 DHS has committed to 9 circuit rides of 6 officers who are expected to interview 9,400 individuals. We expect to see over 4,400 Iraqis arrive in the U.S. from the in-country program this year, compared with 1,466 last year, and to have a robust pipeline of ready to travel cases moving into 2011. While Baghdad has a queue of approximately 27,000 individuals actively moving through the process, there are 4,600 individuals that are already approved and pending outprocessing and we are currently processing cases at approximately the same rate at which new cases are received. In the fall of 2008 approximately 215 new case applications were received per week versus the 92 cases per week received in the same period in ¶2009.

¶3. (U) The processing increase is possible because of physical improvements made to the refugee facility in Baghdad, procedural improvements by IOM and the commitment of additional State Department and DHS resources. The program moved into its current home in a Saddam-era building in the area known as Meadowlands on Forward Operating Base (FOB) Prosperity in the International Zone (IZ) in May 2009. While a huge improvement over the trailers previously used in a parking garage, the building had only 14 offices/interviewing rooms and a small crowded waiting room. Trailers were subsequently installed which allowed the inside waiting area to be divided into three additional offices. Off-site

secure storage of case files has further freed up an additional office. These facility changes have resulted in the ability to screen an additional 150 cases/360 individuals per month. IOM is utilizing the building to capacity to prescreen enough cases to feed into the nine FY10 DHS circuit rides.

14. (U) Processing efficiency has been improved by increased staffing at IOM's main office in Amman and improved scheduling procedures. Qat IOM's main office in Amman and improved scheduling procedures. IOM has more than doubled its overseas processing entity (OPE) staff in Amman committed to the USRAP and specifically Baghdad. The increase in resources has allowed IOM to improve scheduling procedures and ensure that the circuit rides are fully scheduled. One of the most difficult challenges of the Iraq program is contacting applicants to schedule interviews. IOM reports a 50% success rate of contacting applicants who list one cell phone number. That rate jumps to 75% when there are two numbers listed. The most efficient ways to communicate with Iraqis has been through email and cell phone texts. Because of the difficulty in contacting applicants, IOM must have at least 650 prescreened cases to schedule a circuit ride of 450 cases. This means that Baghdad must maintain a large pool of prescreened cases and continue to prescreen cases at a higher rate than DHS can interview. When scheduling a circuit ride, IOM staff in Amman contact the applicant three to four times to confirm the interview and over-schedule by several cases to account for applicants who will not show for their interviews. This ensures maximum utilization of the interview slots.

15. (SBU) The commitment of additional resources to the multi-agency security clearance process in Washington has resulted in faster Security Advisory Opinion (SAO) results. We estimate that the SAO processing time for Iraqis has been reduced to an average of less than 2 months compared with 4 months or longer 6 months ago. The

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policy to no longer require re-running a CLASS namecheck after receiving SAO results for Iraqi refugees has resulted in significantly fewer repeat SAOs and faster processing time.

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Focusing on the Most Vulnerable  
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16. (SBU) While the above measures to increase processing output and normalize procedures have resulted in lowered wait times, we project the wait to be 14 months or longer for an Iraqi who applies to the program today. IOM caseworkers and DHS refugee officers have anecdotally reported that refugees' threat statements have become more generalized over the last year and that fewer report facing immediate threat. This overall decreased sense of urgency is corroborated by IOM staff who communicate with USRAP applicants to arrange appointments. IOM further reports that the appointment cancellation rate has increased marginally over the last 8 months. Another possible indicator of decreased urgency is that the percent of cases that have ceased movement in the pipeline because of rejection or the applicant choosing to withdraw from the program has doubled since summer 2009. Between April and July 2009 eight per cent of cases in the pipeline ceased processing compared with sixteen per cent over the last four months.

17. (SBU) The wait time combined with the high cancellation rates and anecdotal evidence that some in-country applicants are not anxious to travel has permitted us to make a concerted effort to target the most vulnerable in the program and those who are anxious to flee. One of the most significant accomplishments of this effort is the improved response time to applicant emails. Baghdad Info Center is IOM's office that receives and processes all in-country applications and inquiries. Due to a heavy backlog, response time was estimated to be 12 weeks in the summer of 2009. Today BIC emails are read within 48 hours and answered within 72 hours. This allows IOM to quickly identify applicants who face immediate threat and expedite cases when appropriate. In addition to applicants who self-identify to IOM, PRM or RefCoord as needing quicker processing, cases with medical conditions are also immediately expedited. As a result of effective procedures approximately 1 in 5 cases are expedited with the goal of pushing the more vulnerable cases to the front of the

queue. Expedited cases can generally be processed in 2-4 months. In November we were able to expedite the case of a vulnerable pregnant woman in 5 weeks.

18. (U) New procedures have been implemented to move individuals who demonstrate an urgency to flee while putting Iraqis who consistently delay the process without compelling reasons at the end of the line. Baghdad follows the standard "two no-show rule" meaning that if an individual does not show for two appointments without providing a compelling reason their case is closed. Closed cases are easily reopened by the OPE if the applicant expresses an interest to continue the process. If applicants tell IOM in advance that they will not attend an interview then they are charged with a cancellation but not a no-show for statistical and case-closure purposes. The new policy states that those applicants are not automatically rescheduled for the next circuit ride but are rather put at the end of the scheduling queue unless the applicant expresses an immediate need to process. Post feels this is an effective means to focus the circuit rides on Iraqis who are willing to commit to the process and feel an urgency to flee. Another means of focusing on the most vulnerable was the creation of a policy to schedule no more than five percent of a DHS circuit ride with cases of Kurdish applicants who live and work in the Kurdistan region (KRG). This decision was made after consultation with DHS officers who expressed concern that many of the Kurdish applicants from the KRG were unable to prove that they faced a threat and many stated that the only threat they faced was when they took the journey to Baghdad for their refugee interview.

19. (SBU) While the Iraq in-country refugee queue remains significant there is no USRAP back-log in Jordan meaning that an applicant is scheduled for a first prescreening interview within a week of submitting a complete application or being referred by UNHCR. Average USRAP processing time in Jordan is 4 to 6 months. USRAP applicants may easily transfer cases from Iraq to Jordan where they may process their cases more quickly while they wait in safety. Encouraging applicants who face immediate threat in Iraq to flee to Jordan for processing continues to be an important protection outlet for vulnerable and urgent cases.

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Moving Forward: Limitations and Planning  
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10. (U) The in-country P2 program is functioning efficiently but at  
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capacity. The physical limitations of the facility in Baghdad mean that we will be unable to increase the number of cases being interviewed. Currently, post estimates that we will be able to process on FOB Prosperity through the end of 2012. Beyond 2012 we are unable to predict when the U.S. will be asked to transfer possession of the base to the Iraqis.

11. (U) Cultural orientation is still not conducted in Iraq because of security and facility concerns. Post believes it is still dangerous for USRAP applicants to travel to the International Zone and the number of times applicants are required to travel through checkpoints should be limited. However; Post does recognize the importance of cultural orientation not only to prepare refugees for their arrival to the U.S. but also to inform P2 applicants about life as a refugee in the U.S. so they may make an informed decision whether to continue processing their USRAP case. In addition to security concerns there are facility dilemmas. IOM staff fall under Chief of Mission authority when in Iraq and as such must abide by Embassy security rules. This means that IOM can only teach CO classes in a hardened structure in the IZ. Such a building that could house a CO class and be accessible to Iraqis has yet to be located. Steps have been taken to fill the CO void including playing a video of an Amman CO class in the waiting room, handing out the Amman CO email address for questions and passing out CO material for applicants to take home. Post will continue to brainstorm CO alternatives with IOM and explore the possibility of one day holding CO classes in Baghdad.

¶12. (SBU) We continue to make contingency plans for security threats and a possible increase in applications or cases needing expedite. Despite security improvements in Iraq, the threat of terrorist attack against the checkpoint into Meadowlands or any of the facilities used for refugee processing remains. Post has taken several measures to improve security including adding concrete T-walls around much of the refugee processing building and continuing to have security personnel evaluate the checkpoint security. Post has assisted IOM in locating and contracting with a second clinic to conduct refugee medical exams so the program is not dependent on a single clinic. IOM's additional staffing in Jordan means that personnel can be shifted to the Iraq program if there is an influx of cases and urgency. However, physical limitations mean that facility changes will need to be made if Baghdad is called upon to process more cases. The alternative would be to encourage threatened Iraqis to flee to Jordan where the program can more easily accommodate an influx of cases.

¶13. (SBU) Comment: As a result of efforts to improve processing efficiency and a concerted dedication of Department and DHS resources, we are on pace to double the number of USRAP P2 cases processed in Iraq this year. A substantial backlog in the Baghdad pipeline remains. It is unclear how many applicants are eager to travel. There are many factors at play in Iraq that could affect the sense of urgency amongst applicants. Factors include the level of violence, whether elections are deemed successful, the economies both in Iraq and the U.S., and USG employment trends. While the number of new applications to the program has decreased by 50 percent over the past year there are reports that USF-I contractors expect to hire thousands of Iraqi employees to replace third-country national employees over the next 8 months. This could drastically affect the number of new applications to the P2 program. Anecdotally, IOM caseworkers and DHS officers report that applicants' threat statements have become more generalized over the last year and that applicants are reporting less urgency for immediate flight. [Note: This is consistent with the evolution of threat reports seen in the Special Immigrant Visa caseload.] The program is operating at capacity and has improved methods to focus on vulnerability and individuals eager to travel. End comment.

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